

Panel 1

THE TWINNING OF COUNTY WICKLOW AND SEMINOLE COUNTY

County Wicklow is located on the east coast of the Republic of Ireland, just south of the capital city of Dublin. Initiated after a visit to Ireland by Seminole County Commissioner Larry Furlong, County Wicklow became the first of Seminole's sister counties by joint resolution, or "twinning", on September 7, 1992.

The agreement facilitates the exchange of new ideas and similar experiences. As different as they may seem, the two counties share many similarities and have engaged in a number of joint projects.

Seminole based companies can gain access to the European Union through County Wicklow. Conversely, Wicklow businesses can set up U.S. distribution through Seminole County. Both counties make extensive use of start-up business incubators.

Seminole County (near Orlando) and County Wicklow (near Dublin) are just outside major tourist destinations. Eco and heritage tourism opportunities are abundant in both counties. Travel packages for each county are jointly promoted. Both counties are used extensively as film and television production sites. For example, Wicklow based productions include the feature films "Braveheart", "Angela's Ashes" and "Michael Collins".

Seminole and Wicklow are strong soccer areas. The Irish National Soccer Team trained in Seminole County for World Cup 1994.

The relationship has flourished as Ireland and Seminole County have gone through similar economic transformations. Late in the last century, Ireland became known as the "Celtic tiger" because of its technological industry growth. Similarly, Seminole County became known as the leader of Florida's "high tech corridor".

In a tribute to this expanding relationship, Wicklow Elementary School in Sanford was dedicated in 1997.

Panel 2

COUNTY WICKLOW, IRELAND

County Wicklow (*Cill Mhantain* in Irish) is known as the “Garden of Ireland” because of its breathtaking scenery which includes: the majestic Wicklow Mountains with spectacular valleys; 26 lovely towns and villages; pastoral farmland; and miles of beaches and natural lands stretching along the coast of the Irish Sea.

Wicklow is an ancient land with a wealth of archeological sites and monuments. The earliest habitations are from the Neolithic period, or late Stone Age (4,000-2,500 B.C.). Organized settlements began to appear in the Bronze Age (2,500 – 600 B.C.). The early Irish, or Celts, formed a gathering of communities by building hillforts. Fully organized communities with societal and economic structure developed during the Early Historic Period (450 B.C.-1,150 A.D.) Over time, the region’s economy grew through farming and fishing. Major Viking trading stations were established in the port villages of Arklow and Wicklow Town.

Throughout Ireland’s rich history, Wicklow has played an important role. Ireland had a protracted period of English rule from the 11th century until its independence in 1922. A noted period of Wicklow’s historical impact was the 1798 Rebellion when the famous Irish nationalist Michael Dwyer led the fight against British rule until his surrender in 1803. The infamous period of the Wicklow Gaol was from 1709-1900. The gaol, an unimaginable prison with appalling conditions, was home to thousands of petty, serious and political convicts, sometimes including entire families. Even those deemed insane were intermixed with prisoners. Many of these prisoners were given their freedom by accepting passage to America or Australia. The gaol has been preserved as a memorial and museum.

Wicklow today is a modern, vibrant economy and a tourism haven of uncommon beauty. The friendly people of County Wicklow will give you a warm welcome when you visit their unique part of Ireland.

Panel 3

THE WICKLOW WAY

The people of Ireland are known for their passion of walking. Ireland's formal trails are known as "ways". The Wicklow Way is Ireland's first established and most popular trail system. The trail covers a distance of 82 miles starting in South Dublin at sea level, climbing through the Dublin Mountains and switching from glen to glen to the dramatic scenery of the Wicklow Mountains. The granite-domed mountains rise to a height of nearly 3,050 feet with much of the trail climbing over 1,640 feet. The Wicklow Way ends in the rural farmland of Clonegal.

It seems at almost every turn the trail provides yet another breathtaking vista. From the mountain vantage points, outstanding views include the City of Dublin, the Irish Sea and the coast of Wales beyond. The trail offers a variety of landscapes including forested glens, fields of heather, mountain lakes and spectacular deep valleys. Noteworthy points are Luggala, the lakes of Glendalough, Glenmalur, Lough Dan and the Powerscourt Waterfall. The trail is a walk through County Wicklow's thousands of years of history. Well-marked ancient and more recent historical sites abound the route and nearby diversions.

The trail is accessible at many points for short walks, or may be completed at a comfortable walking pace in 5 or 6 days. Small villages and towns along the route offer Irish hospitality and boarding accommodations. You can hike the Wicklow Way year round to enjoy the seasonal changes in lighting, scenery and flora.